UNITED
NATIONS

S

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/411
13 April 1999
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

LETTER DATED 12 APRIL 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 11 April 1999 from Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq. The Minister calls attention to the epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease in Iraq and to the consequent large-scale destruction of livestock and the economic costs in terms of the red meat and dairy products lost, which exacerbates the suffering of Iraqis already undernourished owing to the maintenance of the unjust embargo imposed on the country; and he appeals to you to urge the specialized agencies of the United Nations to undertake to supply Iraq, with all necessary dispatch, with sufficient quantities of vaccine to halt the epidemic.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Saeed H. HASAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Letter dated 11 April 1999 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General

Further to my letter dated 27 February 1999 (S/1999/219, annex), I should like to present the facts set forth hereunder concerning the spread of foot-and-mouth disease in Iraq.

1. When the Government of Iraq's comprehensive development plan was being implemented in the 1970s, an important enterprise was established for the production of vaccine against the three types of foot-and-mouth disease (O, A and Asia), and for the identification of the types and strains of the virus that causes the disease. It had a design capacity to produce 12 million doses of triple vaccine a year in order to meet the vaccine needs of the country and the region as Iraq's contribution to controlling the disease. The plant's laboratories were provided with modern equipment for the production of the vaccine and for diagnostic purposes. The French company Rhône-Merieux undertook to build the plant and to supervise it for a 20-month period from the time production began in April 1982.

2. From 1984 onwards and for many years, large quantities of the single, double and triple vaccines produced in the plant's laboratories were exported to Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Laos and France. The enterprise continued to produce and export until early 1991.

3. At the time, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations regarded the plant's facilities as reference laboratories for the identification of types and strains of the virus that causes the disease.

4. Work at the plant was briefly suspended during the 30-Power aggression against Iraq in 1991. It subsequently resumed, and production continued until 1992 using the raw materials available in the plant's stockrooms. Because of the conditions created by the embargo, the impossibility of importing the raw materials used for production and the destruction of the plant's equipment, work on the production of vaccines stopped. It thereby became impossible to bring the plant back into operation, given that the production of this vaccine involves a long series of processes, requiring the participation of a large number of employees, in which each step is essential. This is especially so since the method used in producing this vaccine differs greatly from that for other vaccines because it involves such complex processes as are familiar to specialists in the field.

5. Given its desire and its need to continue this work, Iraq approached the United Nations, through the proper channels, with a view to securing approval for the removal of certain supplies from the plant, after it had been closed down and its equipment had been destroyed at the beginning of 1996, for use in the clinical analysis of specimens of what was believed to be foot-and-mouth disease. Because of the unwarranted delay caused when United Nations approval of all the requests made was not forthcoming, long after the outbreak of the disease had come and gone, Iraq lost an important opportunity to halt the spread of the disease at that time. This caused the destruction of livestock and economic losses on a very large scale, particularly since early diagnosis and

the identification of the strain of the pathogen involved contribute greatly to the speedy determination of the type of vaccine required for purposes of immunization.

6. Should the claim be made that there is a possibility of operating this plant at the present time, then whoever can contribute to the production of vaccine at this facility in its present condition has an open invitation, although the Iraqi authorities concerned are fully convinced that this is impossible in current circumstances. In this connection, it might be useful for the United Nations to give approval for representatives of Rhône-Merieux to make an assessment of the damage done to the plant and its equipment and to endeavour to put it back into operation.

The large-scale destruction of the plant's equipment has done a great injustice not only to Iraq but also to the countries of the region that were the direct and regular beneficiaries of its production. This is especially true since all the countries of the region have experienced epidemics of this disease (as the relevant international organizations are aware) and they have caused major economic losses. Iraq, in particular, is suffering from the effects of a disease that is incurring large-scale economic costs in terms of the quantities of red meat and dairy products lost, thereby exacerbating the suffering of many Iraqis already undernourished owing to the maintenance of the unjust embargo imposed on the country.

The Government of Iraq urgently requires the specialized agencies of the United Nations to provide sufficient quantities of vaccine to meet Iraq's immediate needs under the national plan for preventive vaccination against foot-and-mouth disease and so as to mitigate the suffering that will be caused by it according to the projections of specialists in Iraq on the possibility of new epidemics and in the light of reports of the disease in other countries of the region. All animals in Iraq will, of course, be susceptible to infection because they have not been immunized against the disease.

The Government of Iraq hopes that you will urge the specialized agencies of the United Nations to undertake to supply Iraq, with all necessary dispatch, with sufficient quantities of vaccine to halt the epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease threatening livestock in the country.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Mohammed Said AL-SAHAF
Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Iraq